SPECIAL FEATURE NO. 3-1507 APRIL 19, 1978
JOHN C. FARRIS

MICHAEL COLGRASS
(MUSIC EXCERPT AVAILABLE IN THE TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR:

THE RECIPIENT OF THIS YEAR'S PULITZER PRIZE FOR MUSIC IS CHICAGO-BORN COMPOSER MICHAEL COLGRASS. V-O-A'S JOHN FARRIS PREPARED THIS SPECIAL FEATURE ON MISTER COLGRASS AND HIS MUSIC.

VOICE:

MICHAEL COLGRASS WAS BORN JUST FORTY-SIX YEARS AGO. HE GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, AND HAS STUDIED WITH SUCH PERHAPS BETTER KNOWN COMPOSERS AS WALLINGFORD RIEGGER, DARIUS MILHAUD AND LUKAS FOSS. HIMSELF A PERFORMER ON PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS, MISTER COLGRASS' COMPOSITIONS HAVE OFTEN GIVEN PROMINENCE TO PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS. AMONG SUCH WORKS ARE A RHAPSODIC FANTASY FOR FIFTEEN DRUMS, VARIATIONS FOR FOUR DRUMS AND VIOLA, FANTASY VARIATIONS FOR PERCUSSION, AND DEJA VU -- THE PIECE THAT EARNED HIM THE PULITZER PRIZE THIS YEAR.

ANOTHER INTEREST OF MICHAEL COLGRASS IS MUSIC OF CHILDHOOD -- THAT IS, BOTH MUSIC ABOUT CHILDHOOD, AND MUSIC WRITTEN FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES AND, FOR THAT MATTER, YOUNG MUSICIANS. HE HAS MADE SOMETHING OF A SPECIALTY OF BREAKING DOWN, OR OTHERWISE CIRCUMVENTING, THE BARRIERS THAT SOMETIMES ARE FOUND BETWEEN "SERIOUS" MUSIC AND YOUNG PEOPLE, WHO OFTEN HAVE COMPLAINED THAT SUCH MUSIC IS TOO REMOTE. OR, AS THEY FREQUENTLY SAY, "IRRELEVANT." MICHAEL COLGRASS BELIEVES THAT TOO OFTEN MUSIC IS REMOTE AND IRRELEVANT, OR AT LEAST IT IS TOO OFTEN MADE TO SEEM SO.

(OPT) EAGER TO AVOID A STEREOTYPED IMAGE AS A NEW YORK COMPOSER OF THAT KIND OF "SERIOUS" MUSIC, MISTER COLGRASS ONCE BEGAN A LECTURE TO A GROUP OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS BY TAKING OFF MOST OF HIS CLOTHES AND STANDING ON HIS HEAD. HE THEN EXPLAINED TO THEM

THAT OUR BODIES ARE OUR PRIMARY MUSICAL "INSTRUMENTS," AND WE HAVE TO KEEP THEM "TUNED" FOR SUCH PERFORMANCES. FROM THAT POINT ON, HE HAD THE ATTENTION OF HIS YOUNG AUDIENCE. (END OPT)

MISTER COLGRASS SAYS HE FINDS YOUNG AUDIENCES VIBRANT AND ATTENTIVE, AND -- WHEN PROPERLY APPROACHED -- COMPLETELY RECEPTIVE TO ASPECTS OF POETRY AND MUSIC COMMONLY THOUGHT OF AS TOO SOPHISTICATED FOR THEIR COMPREHENSION WITHOUT SOME EXPLANATION. HE DESCRIBES A RECENT YOUNG PEOPLES' CONCERT OF HIS MUSIC THAT INCLUDED A PIECE FOR YOUNG VOICES. HE FOUND THE YOUNGSTERS EAGER TO KNOW HOW HE, AS THE COMPOSER, WANTED HIS PIECE TO SOUND, QUICK TO LEARN IT, AND EXTREMELY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT PERFORMIING IT. HE LEFT THAT CONCERT, MISTER COLGRASS SAYS, FEELING SOMETHING HE HAD NOT KNOWN AS A COMPOSER BEFORE -- A REAL CONTACT WITH HIS AUDIENCE.

AS IT HAPPENS, MISTER COLGRASS' MOST FAMOUS AND MOST POPULAR PIECE ALSO HAS TO DO WITH CHILDHOOD. IT IS CALLED "AS QUIET AS," THE TITLE BEING DERIVED FROM THE EXPERIENCE A SCHOOLTEACHER HAD ASKING HER FOURTH-GRADERS TO COMPLETE THE SENTENCE "LET'S BE AS QUITE AS..." IN IMAGINATIVE WAYS. SOME OF THEIR CONCLUDING PHRASES ASTONISHED MICHAEL COLGRASS, AND THE PIECE BEGAN TAKING SHAPE IN HIS MIND. SOME OF THE PHRASES WERE: "...A LEAF TURNING COLORS," "...AN ANT WALKING," "...CHILDREN SLEEPING," AND "...THE FIRST STAR COMING OUT." THESE WITH THREE OTHERS, BECAME THE TITLES OF THE SEVEN SECTIONS OF "AS QUIET AS."

HERE IS PART OF ONE OF THE MOST CHARMING OF THEM, IN WHICH A FAMILIAR CHILDREN'S PIECE BY BEETHOVEN -- WRITTEN WHEN BEETHOVEN HIMSELF WAS A CHILD -- IS WOVEN INTO THE QUIETNESS OF THE SECTION CALLED "CHILDREN SLEEPING." IT IS PERFORMED BY THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, CONDUCTED BY ERICH LEINSDORF.

<u>MUSIC: "AS QUIET AS" (EXCERPT) (2:00)</u>

(OPT) MICHAEL COLGRASS HAS DEDICATED HIS NINETEEN SIXTY-SIX COMPOSITION, "AS QUIET AS," IN HIS OWN PHRASE, "TO CHILDREN, WITH LOVE AND WITH HOPE."

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BML/RTD